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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000166

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: MILF MEMBERS GET LIFE TERMS FOR DEADLY 2000 BOMBING

REF: A. MANILA 46: KEY TERRORIST CAPTURED
[1](#)B. 2008 MANILA 2677: PHILIPPINE MILITARY OPERATIONS
PRODUCING RESULTS
[1](#)C. 2007 MANILA 3947: ASG CONVICTIONS UNDERSCORE
DETERMINATION IN TERRORISM FIGHT

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Demonstrating the Philippine government's continued commitment to combating terrorism, on January 23, a Manila court sentenced three members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to terms of 20-40 years without parole for five deadly bombing attacks on December 30, 2000 across metro Manila that killed 22 people and wounded almost 100. Mukhlis Hadji Umpara Yunos, Zainal Paks, and Mohammad Amir were convicted for their role in planning and executing the Rizal Day bombings eight years ago, including an explosion that occurred across the street from the U.S. Embassy in downtown Manila. Together with a December 2007 conviction of 14 Abu Sayyaf Group members for terrorist activities and recent successes against Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah members in the southern Philippines, the conviction of the Rizal Day bombers underscores the Philippine government's sustained counterterrorism efforts and highlights the success of USG support to broaden the interagency effort to eliminate terrorist organizations in the country. END SUMMARY.

TRIAL PRODUCES KEY CONVICTIONS

[1](#)2. (C) On January 23, a Manila court sentenced three members the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to life terms without parole for five simultaneous bombing attacks across metro Manila on December 30, 2000. The attacks occurred on Rizal Day, a national holiday, and left 22 people dead and almost 100 wounded. The bombings occurred on a Manila metro light-rail car, inside a commuter bus, at an abandoned gasoline station, in the parking lot of Manila International Airport, and across the street from the U.S. Embassy. According to authorities, five other suspects wanted in connection with these bombings still remain at large. The Philippines abolished the death penalty in 2006, but the courts sentenced Mukhlis Hadji Umpara Yunos, Zainal Paks, and Mohammad Amir to between 20 and 40 years without parole for the planning and execution of the five attacks.

[1](#)3. (U) At the conclusion of the lengthy trial, which ended six years after the arrest of the three suspects, the Philippine government hailed the conviction of the three bombers as "fruits of effective and coordinated efforts of law enforcement, prosecution, and the courts." A spokesperson for President Arroyo added that the conviction "served to reinforce the people's faith in the justice system." Philippine National Police Chief General Jesus Verzosa, who was in charge of the police unit which arrested

one of the suspects in 2003, warned that continued vigilance was necessary in the wake of the recent convictions as retaliatory attacks by the MILF could materialize.

RECENT COUNTERTERRORISM SUCCESSES

¶4. (C) The complexity of battling terrorist groups active in the Philippines enmeshed in a social fabric that includes family, ethnic, political, and religious ties was highlighted during the trial of the Rizal Day bombers. Philippine prosecutors maintained that one of the MILF members and alleged ringleader of the attacks, Mukhlis Hadji Umpara Yunos, was an explosives expert who had carried out attacks for Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist group, an assertion supported by U.S. authorities. The interconnection between different groups involved in terrorist-related activities muddies the waters for Philippine forces seeking to locate key, high value individuals and creates challenges for the security forces in determining the linkages between these individuals and other terrorist groups.

¶5. (C) Nevertheless, recent successes by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the southern Philippines have disrupted terrorist networks in Mindanao and destroyed known terrorist camps in the Sulu Archipelago. Since November 2008, combined military and police efforts in Mindanao, supported by U.S. personnel, led to the capture of senior JI facilitators Hajiruddin Dansalan (ref B) and Omar Venancio (ref A) in November and January 2009, respectively.

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Separately, on December 7, 2008, nearly simultaneous AFP offensives were conducted against high-value Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) members on Jolo island and an ASG group involved in numerous kidnappings on Basilan island. In December 2007, 14 ASG members were convicted in a Philippine court for the May 2001 kidnappings of 20 persons, including U.S. citizens Gracia and Martin Burham and Guillermo Sobero from a Philippine resort (ref C).

COMMENT

¶6. (C) The Philippine court's conviction of the MILF members involved in the Rizal Day bombings is the most recent example of the Philippine government's emphasis on thwarting homegrown terrorism. The trial, while lengthy, illustrated the growing maturity of the Philippine legal system in melding contributions from different law enforcement agencies that increasingly are sharing evidence and data in pursuit of a public trial and conviction. Recent counterterrorism operations in the southern Philippines and convictions of accused terrorists tangibly illustrate the Philippine government's expanded approach to defeating terrorism by combining law enforcement tactics with transparent judicial proceedings. In support of these interagency operations, the Mission continues to conduct training on military proficiencies, as well as on law enforcement tactics and judicial procedures.

KENNEY